DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 332 CE 076 074

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TITLE Using Multiple Intelligences and Multi-Sensory Reinforcement Approaches To Enhance Literacy Skills among Homeless Adults.
PUB DATE 1997-07-19
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Congress on Challenges to Education (Kihei, HI, July 19, 1997)
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Cognitive Style; *Homeless People; Individualized Instruction; *Learning Modalities; Learning Processes; *Literacy Education; *Multiple Intelligences; Multisensory Learning; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

In order to reach and teach homeless adults, teachers must acknowledge each student as an individual and take into account the talents and intelligences each person possesses. Students should be encouraged to share their backgrounds, both as a source of improving their self-esteem and as a starting point for enhancing their educational work. Educators in programs that serve homeless adults need to ensure the use of andragological techniques that praise students for the diversity of experiences that each brings to the educational settings and the variety of talents possessed by each student. The concept of multiple intelligences, as advanced by many educational leaders, should be recognized in structuring programs for homeless adults. The following cognitive domains should be taken into account: verbal-linguistic; logical-mathematical; visual-spatial; body-kinesthetic; musical-rhythmic; interpersonal; intrapersonal; and naturalistic. The use of multiple intelligences is one approach to individualization of education that can be taken successfully with homeless adults. (KC)

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# USING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES AND MULTI-SENSORY REINFORCEMENT APPROACHES TO ENHANCE LITERACY SKILLS AMONG HOMELESS ADULTS

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*Presented at the* ***International Congress on Challenges to Education:***
***"Balancing Unity and Diversity in a Changing World,"***
*Kihei, Hawaii, July 19, 1997*

ED 417 332

While most of us awaken each morning in a comfortable bed within the security and safety of our own home, approximately one-half million Americans awaken homeless. These Americans – adults and children – reside in shelters and hotels; they sleep on streets and other places not intended for human habitation; they reside in short-term foster homes; or, they live with other families in what is known as double-up residences. Persons are identified as homeless if they live in any of these situations; basically, because they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate place of residence.

The American homeless are quite transient and are often ignored. Too frequently they fail to receive the social and/or educational services to which they are entitled due to their constant mobility or other conditions which may be out of their control. Thus, it is often difficult to complete an educational program or acquire a particular employment skill. Frequent barriers faced include lack of child care, unavailable housing (e.g., the person has reached the limit on stay in a shelter), or lack of spousal support (i.e., the spouse feels threatened by this educational endeavor). In addition to the aforementioned impediments to receiving adequate services, educational programs are too frequently designed in a fashion that makes them irrelevant to student interests and needs; that is, the teaching doesn't take into account the background which the student brings to the setting. Adult students – even homeless adult students – have varied backgrounds and experiences which often enhance their educational endeavors. At the very least, these can be useful as an instructional starting block. Sharing these experiences can serve as a source of improved self-esteem.

Through the use and acknowledgment of each student as an individual and through the recognition of the talents and intelligences that we all possess, we can offer an educational program to homeless adults which is positive and which builds self-esteem ... one which contributes to a brighter future. Educators in programs which serve homeless adult populations need to ensure the use of androgological techniques which praise students for the diversity of experiences which each brings to the educational setting; these educators need to celebrate the variety of talents possessed by each student, not ignore them.

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Using techniques derived from Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, educators can provide for adults that which has been provided for children in many educational settings for well over 100 years. The theoretical bases for enriched educational approaches in androgogy lie in the work of educators and leaders in the adult movement such as Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Holbrook, John Vincent, Seaman Knapp, Jane Addams, and Booker T. Washington. Individualized educational approaches—approaches which draw on the personal experiences which each adult learner brings to the educational setting—were demonstrated as successful in programs established by these leaders (e.g., Addams' Hull House programs, Knapps' cooperative extension service, Vincent's Chautaugua, and Washington's industrial education programs). However, even with the exemplary pioneering work of these respected adult educators and with the knowledge of the positive utility of transference of some principles of pedagogy to adult settings, we still operate too many adult education programs in a fashion that is less-individualized than the way we treat children in elementary school settings.

Too often, we fail to acknowledge that students in homeless adult educational programs come to the educational setting with an enriched background. Too often, the assumption is that one form of impoverishment necessarily demonstrates impoverishment in all aspects of one's life. In reality, homeless adults are similar to other adult students. That is, they come to the educational setting with a variety of personal backgrounds and with a broad array of educationally-driven vicissitudes. For many, some or most of these educational endeavors occurred in settings other than formal classrooms, but the experiences were no less valuable and should not be ignored or treated as insignificant. While it is true that some of the educational experiences of homeless adult learners were negative, these same students can cite many more positive growth experiences; teachers in homeless adult education settings can, and should, use these positive experiences as a source of androgological enrichment.

In Fogarty's and Bellanca's book, **Multiple Intelligences**, Howard Gardner identifies "the danger os not giving individuals enough choice in their educational and life options." He points out that in less-democratic systems there are almost no choices given to children during their education. He also notes that although we offer choice in our country, too many student end up specializing in a field only to later realize that it really wasn't what they wanted; rather, it was what someone else wanted for them.

These are the truths that often lie within educational programs for homeless adults. We "tell" the student what he/she "needs" to learn. Too often, we don't offer an opportunity for the student to tell us where he/she has been, or what he/she would like to learn and why.

By recognizing the multiple intelligences upon which we rely, and by recognizing that everyone does not rely upon the single one domain of intelligence, we can offer students



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in adult homeless education programs the opportunity to expand, explore, and overcome some serious barriers. Once we get to the point where we actually dialogue with our adult students—a dialogue intended to yield understandings of established knowledge bases—we can begin to see these students develop an awareness of self-worth, and we can begin to establish an educational environment where students recognize the potential contributions that they can provide for as well as receive from others . For example, we need to take very seriously the lessons learned from Jane Addams. She didn't tell her Hull House students that they needed to learn to read and write. Instead, she capitalized on the interests and skills of members of the Hull House community to serve as a source of inspiration and expertise to other members. At Hull House, every person was a uniquely contributing member of the community; each felt valued as well as helped.

Among the many principles which we have adopted as guiding precepts in adult education, is the belief that adult learners bring to the educational setting their own self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-perceptions. We also know that these learners achieve best when they are in a supportive and non-threatening educational setting, that they have a need to be treated as mature adults (rather than be treated like immature children), and that each has already established a preferred learning style which should be capitalized upon by the instructor. In addition to the matter of establishing a safe and respectful environment, educators in homeless adult educational settings will find themselves as more successful when designing instruction that capitalizes on established student learning styles.

One approach to individualizing approaches in homeless adult educational settings is to design programs that can capitalize on the individual cognitive approaches and strengths of program students. Use of Gardner's multiple intelligences approaches constitutes on approach that would enhance teaching/learning among homeless adult students. These approaches are based on specific interests and unique capabilities of individual students and, consequently, serve as mechanisms for individualizing instruction. Gardner's typology of intelligences, originally organized into seven domains and now recently expanded to include an eighth type, includes the following cognitive domains:

> ***Verbal-Linguistic:*** The intelligence domain seen most frequently in formal, organized educational settings. This domain emphasizes learning through reading and oral discourse. It is dependant on accurate encoding and decoding of written and verbal symbols. Too frequently, adult students have had less-than-pleasant educational experiences because of over reliance on the verbal-linguistic domain. Thus, instructors—even those instructors whose goal is to improve the reading/writing skill of particular adult students—should employ approaches from other domains to facilitate the development of skill in this area.
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> ***Logical-Mathematical:*** The domain dealing with understanding concepts and

thought processes based on analytical and deductive endeavors. Too frequently, teachers view this domain as "numbers driven." However, while some students may have an affinity for arithmetical computation, the essence of this domain is the use of deduction in approaching problem situations. Many homeless adult students have honed a form of deductive reasoning that is inherent in mathematical logic and, when encouraged to use these logical processes, can experience quick success in "figuring out" appropriate responses to problem situations.

***Visual-Spatial:*** Consideration of the space around one and one's own relationship to that space in understanding conceptual matter. While sometimes thought to be peripheral to teaching fundamental skills to homeless adult students, the use of visual-spatial domain can be useful in enhancing understanding of basic relationships among discrete parts of a conceptual whole. Just as an adult lives in and responds to his/her specific environment, concepts live in an environment. Some students can, when presented with the conceptual environment, see the whole much more quickly than if the whole of the environment were never presented. A "trick" for the instructor is to determine which students can benefit from the presentation of this "whole" (in which case it should be provided) and which students merely become confused by it (it which case it should be avoided). Thus, utilization of this domain as an instructional approach with homeless adults is appropriate only as an individualized technique

***Body-Kinesthetic:*** The domain dealing with movement is more frequently of beneficial use to childhood educators. Especially as children are developing physically and exploring their own physical limits, the utilization of kinesthetic methodologies enhances learning. However, many adults enjoy – indeed, many rely upon – physical activity as a vehicle for learning and understanding procedures. As the sage Confucius said, one learns by doing. For many of us, doing is rooted in physical activity.

***Musical-Rhythmic:*** This domain exists not only as an instructional approach, but also an environmental consideration. In settings where memorization of facts are important to learner outcomes, some adults find it helpful to put lists in rhyming and/or musical sequences. More significantly, adult educators should recognize the impact of musical environmental considerations on adult learning. Some adult learners require a relatively quiet, distraction-free environment in order to study. Others, especially adults with an affinity for the musical-rhythmic domain, do better is a setting which has a radio playing appropriately non-distracting music. Thus, it is important for educators in homeless adult education program settings to distinguish between these different student needs and, to the extent possible, establish appropriate learning environments for each group.

***Interpersonal:*** The second most frequently utilized domain in formal adult education settings—one in which learning occurs as a result of interaction with others. Many adults are "socially oriented." This is especially true of adults who have been highly successful in educational settings. Thus, many adult educators—because of their own preferences and previous successes—tend to emphasize learning as a result of interpersonal interaction. However, an equally large proportion of homeless adult students have experienced difficulties which were rooted in interpersonal interactions. Therefore, adult educators need to be very careful to determine which students can benefit from utilization of interpersonal approaches, and which students would merely find such approaches unfulfilling or—even worse—threatening.

***Intrapersonal:*** That domain of learning in which we use self-reflection as a means of growth. Many adult students find self-reflection to be a very valuable and motivating force for learning. Effective adult educators approach this domain as a powerful individualized means of identifying student needs, establishing intended outcomes, and driving efforts. Instructors in homeless adult education programs can/should utilize the power of this domain, but must be careful to not rely on its use as a universal approach. Some homeless adult students come to educational programs with extremely low self-esteem. In these cases, a foundation for the use of intrapersonal approaches must be established. (Without such a foundation, self-reflection can become self-pity or self-depreciation.)

***Naturalistic:*** The most recently developed conceptual approach to cognition, builds on one's response to his/her natural setting. As social awareness of nature and natural settings has increased over the past two decades, so have individual awarenesses and responses to nature. Many adult students have a well-defined concern for their natural environment. Astute adult educators will be able to identify these interests among a subset of adult students and will use the interests of those students to advance achievement.

Certainly, the use of multiple intelligences is not the only approach to individualization. It is one of many that can be used. The value of utilizing a multiple intelligences approach is that, frequently, the domains employed will reinforce the gains acquired through other domain approaches. Homeless adult students, like all other adult students, will find satisfaction in the use of "favorite domain oriented" activities. The satisfaction derived from utilization of these "other domain" approaches will enhance learning and achievement.

Roby Kidd's creed for educators includes the admonition that we "should never try to make another human being exactly like [ourself.]" Indeed, the goal of educators working with homeless adult students is to facilitate the complete development of each individual

student as a unique person. The utilization of a variety of instructional approaches will expedite the realization of this goal. It is most important that instructors in homeless adult educational settings realize that each student is a unique individual coming to the program with expertise that has been created as a result of that individual's experiences in his/her own world. This expertise may be the result of experiences in formal educational settings, or it may be the product of other real-world experiences. In any case, future learning and development can be enhanced by individualized techniques that are built on students interests, capabilities, and cognitive strengths.



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